

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION
Katjana Ballantyne
Mayor

Staff

Hanalei Steinhart
Program Specialist, Fair Housing and
Inclusionary Housing Support

Commissioners

Patrice Faulkner
Dennis Fischman
Rona Fischman
Janine Lotti

Meeting Minutes

December 28th, 2023, 3:00pm
Via Zoom
Online Video Platform

Attending: FHC members: Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman, Janine Lotti
City staff: Hanalei Steinhart, Lisa Davidson

I. Call to Order and Review of Draft Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.

A motion was introduced to approve the minutes from the Commission's November meeting. The minutes were approved by unanimous roll call vote.

II. Standing Agenda Items

Dennis Fischman and Hanalei Steinhart led review of the two standing updates on the agenda: Fair Housing Facebook page update and review of Fair Housing calls and/or complaints, respectively.

1. Facebook page update: Dennis noted, for anyone who may later watch a video of the meeting, that the FHC's Facebook page can be found by searching "Somerville Fair Housing Commission" and that he generally posts a question of the week on Fridays and a fair housing-related news item on Mondays. Dennis reviewed the two most popular posts and the number of views, comments, shares, and engagements (e.g. "shares" or "likes") that the post had.

The most popular post was seen by 135 people and was shared by 4 people. The post asked, "What kinds of questions CAN a landlord ask you if you are looking to rent from him or her?" The answer explained that the landlord can only ask questions about application requirements that are asked of all tenants such as rental history, credit history, and references. This post was shared by four people.

2. Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Hanalei reported that no calls or complaints had been received since the last Fair Housing Commission meeting.

III. Communications

1. Status update on new Commission member appointment process: Hanalei shared that Mike, Dennis, and her had an initial conversation with a candidate for the position. Hanalei

is working with SOIA on translating the press release to do additional outreach as a second application has not been received at this time. Dennis clarified the current policy which is that two candidates must be presented for consideration to promote equity in the appointing process.

2. FY23 Annual Report is awaiting internal review: Mike shared that the FY23 annual report is still awaiting his review. He also announced that Lisa is now the Assistant Housing Director.
3. Schedluing 2024 Commission Meetings: Rona suggested that the Fair Housing Commission meet in the evening once per quarter to become more available to members of the public who work during the day and wish to attend the meetings. The Commissioners agreed with Rona's proposal. Beginning in March 2024, every fourth Commission meeting will be held at 6pm. The meetings will remain on Zoom. Commission meetings will remain on the fourth Thursday of the month at 3pm with the exception of the quarterly meeting.

IV. **Updates on Specific Activities**

Commissioners reviewed 3 areas of ongoing activity in the order they follow below.

1. Anti-Displacement Task Force updates: Rona Fischman, who is a Task Force member, shared that the home rule petition for rent stabilization was unanimously approved by the City Council on 11/30/23 and subsequently signed by Mayor Ballantyne. The petition has been transmitted to the state legislature. The task force is now discussing what are the most important policy areas when considering ways to reduce impediments to fair and affordable housing in Somerville. Rona shared that the task force is working on creating a balanced work plan with some items that can be accomplished in the short term as well as larger items that are expected to take several years to complete.
2. MCAD and related issues follow-up: The Commission submitted a letter to the Somerville City Council in regard to MCAD's case backlog in December 2022. Hanalei let the Commission know that she submitted a public records request to MCAD on the current status of the backlog, and she has yet to hear back. Hanalei and Lisa are also reviewing the ordinance, and Hanalei will be doing more of the investigative work before referring it to MCAD. This will help take some of the load off of MCAD.
3. Fair Housing Month Planning
 - a. Color of Law event planning: The Commission discussed their plans for educational outreach during Fair Housing Month in April. Rona discussed setting dates for the fair housing month events so that she could begin to reserve spaces such as the accessible rooms at the Central Library or at one of the community schools. Hanalei volunteered to share a poll with the Commissioners to see what times would work best for event planning.
 - b. TAP Application Status Update: The Commissioners discussed the scope of the application which details seven events for Fair Housing Month. Hanalei and Rona shared that the application suggested that applicants dream big, but that seven events is very ambitious. Hanalei shared that she intends to submit the application before the deadline of January 12th, 2024.

V. **Announcements**

1. The next meeting will be on January 25th at 3pm via Zoom.

VI. **Adjournment**

1. The meeting was adjourned at 3:58pm by roll call vote.